
Natural Gas

A consumer tip sheet



*A Publication of the
Massachusetts
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Resources*

*Commonwealth of
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Questions about Prices

Nationwide, natural gas accounts for 24 percent of our total energy use and is used by all types of consumers – residential, commercial, and industrial. Demand for natural gas varies according to the season and severity of the weather. Extremely cold winter days, for example, result in peak demand days for natural gas. Pricing of natural gas reflects competitive market reaction to demand. Factors that can increase demand, and thus the price, of this fuel include:

- Colder than normal weather. At these times natural gas pipelines operate at peak capacity and stocks are drawn down from storage.
- Reduced stockpiles of natural gas. Natural gas is stored in the summer when demand is usually low. However, increased use of air conditioning and therefore increased demand for electricity means winter reserves are lower and more costly.
- Increased demand for natural gas as the primary fuel for new electric generation plants, factories, and other industrial customers because it is cleaner and more efficient than other fuels.
- For power plants and other industrial processes that can run on more than one type of fuel, demand (and pricing) for natural gas increases as the price for other fuels rise.

What can consumers do?

Consumers may pursue several options to help lessen the impact of higher prices:

- Check whether energy efficiency measures can save energy for you. In Massachusetts, electric and gas distribution companies and municipal aggregators offer programs to help you invest in energy efficient products and services for your home. (Also available to renters.)

Call: 1-866-527-7283 (SAVE) for more information or contact your gas company:

- Level your monthly payments. Check with your gas utility to see if you qualify for a discount rate. Ask if they offer a budget (level) payment plan that would let you pay a fixed amount each month over twelve-months.
- You may qualify for the heat assistance programs provided by the Commonwealth, including the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). For more information on **LIHEAP** programs call: **1-800-632-8175** or download the Cold Relief Brochure at www.massfuelassistance.com.

General Tips for Saving Natural Gas

- Lower heat at night and when no one is home. A programmable thermostat can be set to do this automatically.
- Have an annual inspection and maintenance done on the furnace. A heating and cooling professional can perform an annual inspection and routine system maintenance to make sure your furnace is operating at peak performance.
- If installing a new furnace or hot water heater, consider a high efficiency model. Check with your local gas distribution company -- you may qualify for a rebate.
- Clean or replace the furnace air filter regularly following the manufacturer's recommendations, especially if you have pets. A dirty or clogged filter will demand more energy and slow the heating process. Make sure your furnace and hot water heater are properly ventilated.
- Check heating ducts for air leaks and insulate those in unheated areas.
- Make sure heat is circulating properly. Keep furniture, draperies, and rugs from obstructing registers and heat vents. Keep radiators and registers dust-free. Move chairs and beds away from exterior walls, these are usually the coldest walls in the house.
- Using a ceiling fan forces warm air down, so you can set your thermostat at a lower temperature.
- Clean the lint trap on your clothes dryer.
- Line dry clothes when possible. Use the dryer for only a few minutes to soften line-dried clothes.
- When you do use the clothes dryer, avoid over-drying clothes.
- Wash clothes in cold or warm water. Hot water is not needed to get most clothes clean. It is the detergent, not the water temperature, that cleans clothes.
- Do not open the oven door while food is cooking. You can lose up to 50 degrees in temperature and waste energy.
- Adjust the gas flame to fit your pans. The flame should never come up around the sides of a pan.
- Keep the lid on pans while cooking. Keeping lids on your pots will make the water boil faster.

Questions About Natural Gas Service

If you smell gas, follow all safety precautions and immediately call your local distribution company or municipal utility. If you are dissatisfied with a billing or service outcome, you can contact:

Massachusetts Department of
Public Utilities
1-800-392-6066

-OR-

Massachusetts Attorney General
1-617-727-8400.

For information on natural gas prices and supply go to the Energy Information Administration natural gas page at: www.eia.gov